

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

\$20 Billion "Green Scheme" Passes House

The House Democratic majority last week brought to the floor a bill that takes \$20 billion in taxpayer money and creates a massive, bureaucratic school construction program.

The 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, H.R. 3021, would authorize \$6.4 billion in the first year to build public schools according to "green" standards while pulling additional funds from Title I programs, which are for low-income students, as well as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This bill was brought to the House floor at a time when gas prices are within a single cent of reaching \$4 per gallon. AAA reported last week that gas prices have reached a new record of \$3.99 per gallon.

These record breaking prices are affecting all parts of our economy – from grocery prices to airline tickets, from school supplies to school lunches, no area of our economy has been left untouched.

While most Alabama schools are out for the summer and school administrators are planning the upcoming school year, many are becoming increasingly concerned about the energy costs they will face when students return to the classrooms.

A number of school districts have started limiting the number of field trips and cutting back on taking their athletic teams on the road. Other school districts, including Alabama's Henry County, are canceling classes one day a week because the cost to operate school buses is astronomical. The average school bus runs on diesel, which is currently averaging an astonishing \$4.77 per gallon, up from \$2.90 per gallon last year.

Clearly, America's schools are suffering as a result of rising gas prices, yet the majority's bill does not allow for any of the funds to be used to help existing schools pay their skyrocketing energy bills.

House Republicans tried to use H.R. 3021 as a means to provide help where it is desperately needed. Specifically, Republicans offered an alternative that would allow schools that have seen their energy costs rise by more than 50 percent since last January, to use the funding to help cover their energy expenditures. Unfortunately, the alternative failed 187-230.

While building new schools to “green” standards is worthwhile and may have long-term benefits, existing schools need help now and that help, sadly, was denied by the House last week. This issue is yet another reminder Congress is not doing enough to address the energy crisis the American people are facing.

This bill still must pass the Senate, and the White House has threatened a veto.

2008 Academy Nominations

One of my greatest privileges as a member of Congress is to nominate qualified young men and women from Alabama’s First District to our United States Service Academies.

So far this year, 13 have received an appointment to one of the service academies. They are as follows:

United States Air Force Academy

Loren Bowman of Robertsdale – Robertsdale High School

David Marston of Chunchula – Mary G. Montgomery High School

John Noojin of Mobile – Baker High School

Jonathon Powell of Daphne – Marion Military Institute

Austin Sidwell of Summerdale – Foley High School

United States Military Academy

Shalela Dowdy of Mobile –

Murphy High School

Ben Fisher of Mobile –

UMS-Wright Preparatory School

Jack O'Dowd of Mobile –

McGill-Toolen Catholic High School

William Semple of Theodore – UMS-Wright Preparatory School

Kyle Sweetser of Mobile – U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School

United States Naval Academy

Jordan Englert of Jackson – Jackson High School

Alex Lichtenfeld of Mobile – UMS-Wright Preparatory School

Jack O'Dowd of Mobile – McGill-Toolen Catholic High School

The education students receive at the five United States Service Academies – the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy at New London, and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point – is one of the best.

For those south Alabama students interested in attending a service academy, it is never too soon to begin the nomination process. One thing is certain – gaining admission to one of the five academies is not easy.

Interested students should contact my office to receive an application packet that includes details of the requirements for obtaining a nomination and general information about the academies.

This fall, I will host my annual Academy Night, which emphasizes the educational opportunities available and provides information on the requirements and procedures for seeking a congressional nomination. Representatives from each of the academies will also be on hand to answer any questions you may have.

We look forward to working with any interested students and their families toward a nomination to one of the service academies. For more information, please contact Brooks Chew in my Mobile office at 251-690-2811.

Congratulations to the students who have received appointments for the Class of 2012.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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*For release the week of Monday, June 09, 2008. For more information please
contact Mike Lewis at (202)225-4931.*